

Message Text

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FM AMCONSUL PORT MORESBY

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 319

INFO AMEMBASSY CANBERRA

CINCPAC

C O N F I D E N T I A L PORT MORESBY 0169

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PGOV, PINT, PP

SUBJECT: HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY VOTES TO DEFER 1976 ELECTIONS ONE YEAR

1. HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY, IN VOTE OPPOSED BOTH BY CHIEF MINISTER AND LEADER OF THE OPPOSITION, PASSED A BACKBENCHER SPONSORED MOTION ON FEB. 25 TO DELAY THE 1976 ELECTIONS FOR THE HOUSE UNTIL 1977. MOTION PRESENTED "IN THE INTEREST OF STABILITY" IN ORDER PRESENT GOVERNMENT WOULD HAVE TWO YEARS IN OFFICE AFTER INDEPENDENCE.

2. PRIVATE MEMBER MOTIONS ARE NOT BINDING ON GOVERNMENT UNLESS GOVERNMENT MAKES STATEMENT ACCEPTING THEM. (THAT IS, EVEN THOUGH PASSED BY A MAJORITY OF THE HOUSE, THE MOTION DOES NOT BECOME LAW UNTIL THE GOVERNMENT TAKES ACTION TO ACCEPT IT.) AUTHORITY OVER ELECTORIAL FUNCTIONS FOR PNG IS STILL RESERVED TO THE GOVERNOR GENERAL OF AUSTRALIA AND PROVISION FOR 1976 ELECTION IS ALSO IN PAPUA NEW GUINEA ACT. IN ORDER FOR SOMARE GOVERNMENT TO ACCEPT MOTION, IT WOULD HAVE TO REQUEST THE TRANSFER OF ELECTORIAL FUNCTIONS TO PNG, A REQUEST THAT WOULD BE HONORED BY AUSTRALIAN GOVERNOR GENERAL SINCE AUSTRALIAN

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GOVERNMENT HAS BOUND ITSELF TO TRANSFER FUNCTIONS TO

PNG UPON REQUEST. AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT WOULD ALSO HAVE TO AMEND THE PAPUA NEW GUINEA ACT TO PROVIDE FOR 1977 ELECTIONS.

3. VIEW OF AUSTRALIA OFFICE AND KNOWLEDGEABLE UNITED PARTY REPS IS THAT LARGE NUMBER OF SITTING MEMBERS OF THE HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY (MHA'S) WILL NOT BE RETURNED AFTER THE NEXT ELECTION, WHETHER IN 1976 OR 1977. THIS WOULD INCLUDE WHITE UNITED PARTY MEMBERS WHO CANNOT STAND DUE CITIZENSHIP RESTRICTIONS. UNITED PARTY REPS BELIEVE THAT ALL THREE MATAUNGAN LEADERS, DAMIEN KEREKU, OSCAR TAMMUR AND JOHN KAPUTIN WILL BE OUT, ALTHOUGH WHEN PRESSED ADMIT THAT OSCAR TAMMUR MAY SCRAPE THROUGH. UNITED PARTY LEADER TEI ABAL AFTER TOUR OF HIGHLANDS IS ALLEGEDLY CONVINCED THAT UNITED PARTY WILL MUSTER DRAMATIC VICTORY SWEEPING HIGHLANDS IN NEXT ELECTION. BOTH WE AND AUSTRALIAN OFFICE CONTINUE HEAR STRONG RUMORS THAT FORMER SIR MAORI KIKI AND MINISTER FOR NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT GAVERA REA ARE BOTH IN TROUBLE IN PAPUA AND WOULD NOT NOW BE RETURNED. UNITED PARTY IN FACT BELIEVES THAT REA AND KIKI PLANTED THE BACKBENCHERS MOTION, AND THAT IT PASSED BECAUSE A VERY LARGE NUMBER OF MHA'S, BECAUSE OF EITHER THEIR INABILITY OR UNWILLINGNESS TO CONSTANTLY CULTIVATE THEIR HOME DISTRICT CONSTITUENTS HAVE LOST MUCH OF THEIR FOLLOWING AND FACE POSSIBLE DEFEAT IN THE NEXT ELECTION. HENCE THE VOTE, TO ADD AN ADDITIONAL YEAR TO THE POLITICAL LIFE OF THE CURRENT HOUSE.

4. COMMENT: IT SEEMS LIKELY THAT EROSION OF STRENGTH OF KIKI AND GAVERA REA MAY HAVE BEEN AFFECTED BY THEIR SUPPORT OF A UNITED PNG WHEN THEIR PAPUAN CABINET MEMBERS STAYED SILENT. IT IS BELIEVED THAT SOMARE PREFERS ELECTIONS BE HELD ABOUT SIX MONTHS AFTER INDEPENDENCE, AND CONSEQUENTLY WILL NOT ACCEPT THE MOTION FOR POSTPONING THE ELECTIONS UNLESS HE SEES THE DATE FOR INDEPENDENCE SLIPPING UNTIL LATE 1976. HE MAY BE FORCED TO FOCUS ON THE ISSUE DURING THE DEBATE SCHEDULED FOR APRIL OR THE DRAFT CONSTITUTION BILL, HOWEVER, AND IN FACT MAY HAVE TO BOW TO THE PRESSURE GENERATED BY THE ANXIETIES OF THE MHA'S IN ORDER TO OBTAIN THEIR FULL SUPPORT IN THIS LAST PUSH TOWARD INDEPENDENCE.
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ISSUE PROVIDES ADDITIONAL EXCELLENT EXAMPLE FRAILITY PARTY DISCIPLINE HERE (OR TOTAL ABSENCE OF IT) IN FACE ISSUES OF PRACTICAL IMPORTANCE TO SITTING MEMBERS OF THE HOUSE.
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